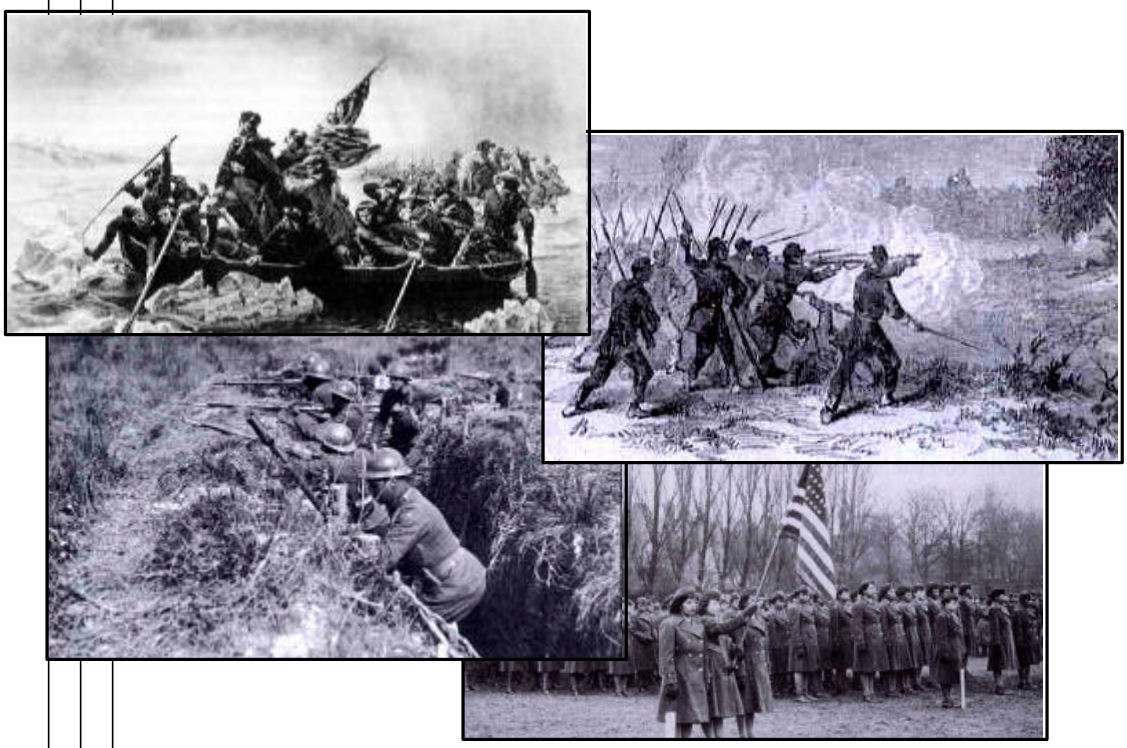
Combat Multipliers

African-American Soldiers in Four Wars

by
Krewasky A. Salter I



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Lieutenant Colonel Krewasky A. Salter graduated from the University of Florida as a Distinguished Military Graduate in December 1984. He received an M.A in history from Florida State University in 1993 and a Ph.D. from Florida State University in 1996, and he is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Lieutenant Colonel Salter took command of the 2d Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artil-lery, Fort Bliss, Texas, in July 2003. Before coming to Fort Bliss, he served as chairman and professor of military science, Howard University, Washington, DC; Army's senior brigade air defense artillery trainer, National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California; and as the battalion executive officer, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Stewart, Georgia.

Lieutenant Colonel Salter is a published author who has taught African-American history at St. Mary College, Leavenworth, Kansas; Benedictine College, Atchison, Kansas;Donnelly College, Kansas City, Missouri; and American military history from the Colonial War to the post-Gulf war as an adjunct professor, Howard University.

Dedicated to CSM Tony L. Salter, U.S. Army, Retired,
and his bride, Mrs. Jewelene Salter,
for their 34 years of active service in the U.S. Army

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combat multiplier—Supporting and subsidiary means that significantly increase the relative combat strength (power) of a force while actual force ratios remain constant. Examples of combat multipliers are economizing in one area to mass in another, leadership, unit morale, surprise, deception, battlefield information, camouflage, electronic warfare, psychological operations, terrain reinforcement, smoke, and indirect fires. (See also combat power.) See FM 100-5. (FM 101-5-1 MCRP 5-2A, 1-31)

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COMBAT MULTIPLIERS: AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOL-


COMBAT STUDIES INSTITUTE

Foreword

This study by Lieutenant Colonel Krewasky A. Salter represents a dedicated effort to draw attention to African-American units and service members over four major wars covering some 170 years. His background in military history and African-American history, along with his numerous professional research, publications, and teaching experiences in both civilian and military institutions, makes him imminently qualified to undertake this project. As a battalion command selectee, Salter has had a remarkable career on the military side as well. He is, therefore, uniquely qualified as a soldier-scholar. Salter has indeed maintained a rock-solid professional reputation in both arenas.

Salter was motivated for the right reasons to undertake this venture. It was not intended to cover all aspects of African-American contributions to the freedom of our great nation but to offer a stimulus for more individual and collective examination of the untold and unwritten accounts of African-Americans in combat in the continental United States and overseas. The intent was not only to attract the students of military history but to provide a broad examination of the facts that would equally attract the casual student of history as well as those who consider themselves professional historians, regardless of their ethnic background.

This study presents a forum for an intellectual discourse on African-American contributions to the development of America. It will definitely be a great addition to the previously published works by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) Combat Studies Institute (CSI) and will surely fill an important void in its catalog. The manner in which Lieutenant Colonel Salter imparts the study's results allows readers to make their own conclusions about the benefit of African-Americans to the successes of each battle or campaign experience and to determine if indeed they truly enhanced the outcome of the wars. Additionally, for the sake of African-Americans, it satisfies some of the omissions from previous historians and gives a better picture of the many Americans who fought continuously and boldly for the United States of America. For the sake of all Americans, especially professional soldiers, it offers insight into an often-overlooked aspect of our American military heritage.

In the time that it took to bring this study to a conclusion, those who established the environment and conditions for Salter to start and successfully complete this work deserve enormous credit for their assistance. Those who facilitated the decision to publish this study as a contribution to the historical record should also be commended.

Reginal G. Clemmons
Major General, U.S. Army
Commandant, National War College
Washington, DC
May 2003

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Introduction

This Special Study has four stand-alone, chronological chapters that examine selected African-American military units spanning from 1775 to 1945, covering the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War I, and World War II, each chapter is conclusive and relative to the big picture. By doing this, I have made it easy for educators to select a chapter to study a particular era, yet use the study as a whole. Although each chapter covers different eras, I have made an effort to link each chapter by writing a "short bridge" to transition to the next chapter rather than, for example, simply jumping from the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783 in chapter 1 to the start of the Civil War in 1861 in chapter 2.

Chapter 1 actually begins in 1770 with the death of a former slave at the Boston Massacre who was willing to give his life for American independence. The chapter then traverses the military chronology of the war from Bunker Hill in 1775 to Yorktown in 1783. In this chapter the transition will briefly examine the roles of blacks during the War 1812 and the Second Seminole War. Chapter 2 will look at black Civil War soldiers in five selected United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.) units. The First Kansas' battle experience in the Midwest will be explored. The struggle of former slaves of the First South Carolina in the Department of the South is also examined. And, arguably the most famous of all black Civil War units, the three Louisiana Native Guards regiments will be discussed—the 54th Massachusetts being the other well-known black Civil War unit. At the end of the chapter, it will become clear that these five units were only a small portion of the black units to serve and fight during the American Civil War. Chapter 3 will begin by briefly discussing the service of black soldiers from 1866 to 1917 in an effort to bridge chapters 2 and 3. The main focus of the chapter, however, will explore, in detail, the 92d and 93d Infantry Divisions and their journey to Europe and eventual combat service during World War I. The contributions of those noncombat arms soldiers will also be addressed. Chapter 4 begins with a synopsis of the struggle to put blacks in uniform during the interwar years 1919 to 1940. The "meat and potatoes" of this chapter will be the five vignettes that examine unique black units. One of the units examined is a black female postal service unit. The result of all the blood shed by black soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and their white compatriots in the 170 years from the start of the Revolutionary War to the end of World War II came to fruition in the form of Executive Order (EO) 9981 in 1948 and the eventual integration of

the military services during, and in the aftermath of, the Korean war. The conclusion will briefly address those latter two points.

It is also important that readers understand how this study was initiated. The Director of Combat Studies Institute (CSI), then Colonel Jerry D. Morelock, asked that I write a study about African-American military servicemen to help fill an important void in the CSI curriculum. The decision to write this paper was not an easy choice to make. As an individual and scholar, it was a dream assignment; as a professional career combat arms Army officer having a desire to just be "one of the guys on the team," it was extremely hard for me to take on this assignment. Yet, even as I accepted Morelock's offer in January 1998, I still was not sure that I really wanted to undertake this research project. What would my thesis be? What angle should I take to make this study interesting to all races, creeds, colors, nationalities, and genders? How would I, being an African-American military history specialist, package such a large area of study into a concise volume that the Army and other military branches could use? Last, and most important to me, was how would I be accepted by my military colleagues after writing on such a topic?

The last question has been the most difficult to deal with because I have had the opportunity on many occasions to literally be that "fly on the wall." Still today, topics of race and gender fuel heated debates that are more times than not filled with ignorance from both sides of the debate. Some will quote African-American history out of context or, worse yet, quote it without factual support. Those on the other side of the debate are quick to cry "revisionist history" or deny the facts of history even when there is credible primary-source documentation to support an argument. Did I want to be a part of these debates as they related to blacks in the military? I knew that I did not want to be on the side that misquoted history, nor did I want to be on the side that considered history, overlooked in the past, revisionist history. I did, however, want to be a bridge for both sides and hopefully bring context and substance to the debates. My decision was not solidified, however, until I experienced a professional "blinding flash of the obvious" in spring 1998.

In May 1998, I was teaching the "African-American Military Experience" elective for the second straight semester at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I was approached by many students—black, white, and one foreign student—who said that they had heard great things about my elective and wished that they had made room on their schedules to take it. Some students actually

overloaded their schedule to take the class. The event that really solidified my professional mind was the day I substituted in the Civil War elective course for one of my CSI colleagues. The particular day that I substituted was the last meeting that term, culminating a complete year of concentrated studies in various military topics, to include military history. Among the several aspects that the primary instructor asked me to ensure his students examined was, "Identify something that was revolutionary about the Civil War that would continue to impact on the military." The usual answers of weapon rifling, railroad usage, and command and control structure, came up. One of the students, who had already demonstrated throughout the previous 2 hours of the 3-hour class that he was a very well-read person, said, "During the Civil War we see for the first time in American history the use of black soldiers, but none actually fought." After I professionally corrected him, with the help of one or two other students in the class, I could see the utter disbelief on the faces of the eight or nine other students in the class. I was not sure if they were upset with their American history educational system or upset with me for having the audacity to discuss this subject. Nonetheless, when I walked out of that class, I knew I had made the right decision to write this study. My most important concern of "how I would be accepted by my military colleagues" was no longer relevant.

Now all that was left was to answer the other three questions. The thesis of this research project is a simple question: "Were persons of African descent contributors on the field of battle, as combatants or noncombatants, during four American wars?" The concise thesis, thus, is "combat multipliers?"* While it is certainly not my intent to conclude that these wars and campaigns were won by black soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines, I firmly believe that they were indeed combat multipliers. Further, I do not suggest that the African-American men and women discussed in the following pages were more deserving of hero status than their white counterparts. The reader must keep in mind that this study, though, is their story. The design of this discourse is simply to introduce the reader to enough information to allow him to make an educated conclusion and to effectively debate and answer the thesis. It may be very likely that some readers will not conclude that blacks were combat multipliers.

What angle should I take? As an American military historian, an African-American history historian, and a career military officer, I decided to put on all three hats to develop my angle. As an American military historian, I wanted the project to fit into well-defined American history periods. Thus, the reader should find that each chapter puts the black

experience, as much as possible, into the middle of the overall war story. As an African-American historian, first and foremost, I wanted to ensure that the information was well sourced and presented. Then I wanted to ensure that the discourse was provocative and interesting enough to incite debate and discussion and cause others to want to examine each area in further detail. It has not been my intent or goal to write a complete history of each era. That task has been left for a full-time historian. Further, it is my hope that a reader of this study will be inspired to write in greater detail on any given segment addressed within the pages of the discourse. As a career military officer, I wanted it to be intellectually inviting enough to attract a wide range of people who would otherwise not be interested in such a topic in history. Nonetheless, my greatest desire was for people in my profession to be better informed about another aspect of their heritage. I did not write this study solely with military students in mind; it was written with the general public in mind as well. It will be engaging reading for anyone interested in American, military, or African-American history or anyone interested in an enlightened read. How would I package the project? That question has been addressed in the first paragraph of this introduction.

To get to my outlined objectives, I completed my study in spring 1999 and presented it to a board of historians and instructors at CGSC and to one outside historian in spring 2000. Although I found that this study was very well received, there were some concerns that I had missed my intent completely. Either it was very clear from the facts presented that blacks were indeed "combat multipliers" and thus little was left to the reader to conclude, or the discourse was too boastful of their participation. Either I was too close to the subject or I was too eager to tell the story to the point that I willingly overemphasized the good. The latter was definitely not true. The first, though, probably had some merit. After the board, I reread the work, edited it heavily in places, and put it on the shelf for a couple of months. The board, which was led by the current director of CSI, Colonel Lawyn C. Edwards, has helped immensely to make this a better and much more balanced study. There are other members of the board I must

thank for their critical, professional, and scholarly insights: Dr. Lawrence A. Yates, CSI Research and Publication Team; Dr. George F. Steger, Chairman, History and Political Science Department, Saint Mary College, Leavenworth, Kansas; and LTC John K. Hackney, Director, Center for Army Leadership, CGSC.

Others who had a hand in the fruition of this study either as a source of encouragement or read parts of the study and offered direct or indirect comments are: Dr. Roger J. Spiller, George C. Marshall Professor of Military History, CGSC; Dr. William G. Robertson, TRADOC Chief of Staff Rides and CAC Historian; Dr. George W. Gawrych, Dr. Samuel J. Lewis, Dr. Michael D. Pearlman, LTC Rick Stephenson, LTC W.E. Bassett, LTC Edward Clay, LTC Walter Kretchik, and LTC Versalles Washington, CSI instructors. Mr. Lew Bernstein, Mr. Donald Gilmore, and Ms. Sharon Torres, CSI. I would also like to thank the CSI editors for their great work with my manuscript. A very special thanks to Commander Clayton Philpot, U.S. Navy Retired, for his constant counsel and to my CSI boss, LTC Sylvia Rivera-Cabasa, for her constant encouragement. Last, to all my peer-students whom I had the honor to teach during the academic year (AY) 1997-98 and AY 1998-99. Their challenging questions, lively debates, and classroom discussions helped to further develop my teaching skills and desire to finish this paper. Thanks to you all. Any shortfalls are solely the fault of this author.

Note

1. In military terms, a "combat multiplier" is any element, usually a battlefield system, or grouping of battlefield systems—such as air defense artillery (ADA) systems, including Stingers, Avengers, or Linebackers, all three missile firing weapons—that enhance the combat power of a fighting force. Without a particular system within a specific environment, winning the battle could be very difficult, if not impossible. For example, if the enemy had a large and powerful air threat, then ADA would be, without doubt, a combat multiplier. The presence of a combat multiplier does not automatically guarantee success. Combat multipliers could also be a specific type of fighting soldier such as infantry, Special Forces, or Delta Forces. In this thesis, it is simply my contention that soldiers of African descent have been combat multipliers on the field of American battles for many centuries.